

Mowris (J. A.)



REFORM.

MEDICINE AND MORALS.

No. 3.

*An Address delivered before the Onondaga Medical Society, at Syracuse,
N. Y., June 14, 1870, by*

J. A. MOWRIS, M. D.

Mr. President and Gentlemen:

Scap Basing a calculation on the statements of the *Uterine Specialists* as to the extent of their trade in a city of forty thousand, we discover in the Uterus a susceptibility to derangement which may well astound the physiologist, alarm the friends of humanity, and impair veneration for Jehovah as the maker of us all. The pretended revelations of the specialty teach that the "Great First Cause," in an attempt to create a harp of a thousand strings, exhausted itself on the last but one, and left the last to dangle at loose ends.

But perhaps they proffer the convenient plea of "new disease." Very well. Nature then made a harp of a thousand strings, which went well enough for several thousand years, when, with a revival of avarice, and the advent of the *speculum*, the harp fell hopelessly out of tune.

The aggregate, from the basis before mentioned, is sufficient to supply every woman in the city about three applications of the *speculum*

per year. Fifty per cent. of their number, six such operations,—twenty-five per cent., twelve—twenty per cent., fifteen,—ten per cent., thirty, and five per cent., *sixty operations*, which latter should certainly be enough to satisfy any speculator, and to cure the most obstinate case.

We have thus, disclosed to us an amazing prevalence of the "peculiar" disease, or a remarkable number of patients undergoing a course of very diligent attention. Are all these really cases requiring treatment? Who believes it? Note the absurdity involved in the supposition. A like susceptibility to derangement in any *one* organ common to both sexes and all ages, would result, at once, in a grave popular calamity—an equal liability in *all* the other organs, would convert the world into a universal infirmary of helpless invalids.

Adam was the handiwork of GOD.

Was Eve the botch-work of a cobbler?

From special inquiry, by letter and otherwise, I learn that physicians engaged extensively in *general and domestic* practice, men well up in the profession and of unexceptional private character, do not, in their judgment, find occasion for the employment of the speculum more times during a year than it is used professedly, by others in a single day.

Pray! how is this? The former are as conversant with the human system; they understand the functions and appreciate the peculiarities of the persecuted organ—are the equals of the former in legitimate income, and at the bedside—their peers in convention, yet they can rarely find occasion for the employment of that instrument.

Are these intelligent physicians blind in just this one direction, or do they not rather evince superior wisdom, comprehension and refinement, in contemplating their patients according to a higher standard? While not inferior in medical qualifications, they evidently still maintain a gentlemanly regard for the sanctity of sex. Fully equal in medical skill—deficient only in modern medical gallantry.

A mode of practice which is under the ban of nearly the entire profession, and under the shadow of popular distrust, can not be safely patronized by persons desirous of maintaining their respectability. This brings us to notice another serious objection to the specialty.—Without improving either, it inferentially approximates the two extremes of female society.

By a fostering indifference to the growth of this pernicious specialty, the profession is making itself amenable for one of the greatest *medical absurdities* of the age. Regard for a moment the function of the uterus, and consider its claims to this monopoly of attention. Let the function of the *lungs* be suspended for three minutes, and death is inevitable. Let the *heart* stand still for half that period, and the vital spark may not be recalled. The *uterus*, on the other hand, is present in the persons of only half the human family—functionally so at any given date, in only one-sixth—valid in the individual but three-sevenths of the allotted seventy years,—and, as we all know, good personal health has been enjoyed after its complete extirpation. Yet, sir, in the very face and eyes of this proof of its numerical and physiological insignificance, scores of regular physicians desire to *abandon* themselves to this specialty; while, throughout this State, from the suburbs of New York city to Buffalo, scarcely a single member of the profession has signified his willingness to specialize in behalf of the *vital* organs.

Apprise the "peculiar" specialist of the fact that cardiac disease is carrying off its hundreds, and consumption its thousands. What cares he for science? What cares he for languishing humanity, so long as he can find a solitary case of hypothetical ulceration? May not the profession properly ask that that strange proclivity shall be accounted for; that some devoted specialist, after undergoing a rigid self-

examination, shall be required to inform us whether, in his own case he is actuated in this choice mostly by animal instinct, or commercial sagacity,—by cupid or cupidity.

And here appears the glaring inconsistency of the profession. Diseases which might claim scores of special students, have no representatives, while rare cases of comparatively trifling derangements, count them by the hundred. What a preposterous dilemma for the faculty. Sir, if there is a member present who has the courage to contemplate this unscientific disparity, and to attempt to reconcile it with medical morality, it is the duty of this Society to welcome him to the floor.

Since this specialty has been courted by physicians hitherto reputable, it has been found convenient or necessary to defend it with a cool assumption of "*professional superiority*." Professional superiority! The claim being prompted by an emergency, rather than by sheer vanity, it should not be too severely resented, but still, it deserves not to escape scrutiny. This vaunted superiority must consist in fact or scientific knowledge. Can it be that this superior tact of which they boast is all displayed in the application of the instrument. Further, the accounts of the specialists' performances rest so entirely on interested testimony, as to be quite apochryphal. That the uterus has been made by the specialist the subject of remarkable skill, is not favored by the law of probabilities; for, in attempting to suppose it, we are confronted by the query, whether physicians who have always shown a morbid solicitude to do their surgical skill where they may be seen of men, will be disposed to waste much of that precious commodity in secret.

But, perhaps at this stage, they are ready to acknowledge that it is not so much *skill* of which they boast as superior knowledge of the sciences. Sir, there is a science, and one which is commonly regarded as rudimentary in a medical education, of which those gentlemen appear entirely ignorant. I refer to that of physiology. (That science teaches that the sexual passage in woman, unlike any other in the human economy, involves the emotional and affectional nature; that its function is intimately related to private virtue, domestic peace and public morality. That, therefore, the interests of humanity demand that, among a civilized people it should never become the subject of foreign manual attention, not even by the physician, until local sensibility has been in part subdued by the solicitude arising from severe disease, or the exalting emotions of impending maternity. Let a woman so far forget herself as to forget this principle, and to her household there will be grief. Let a physician disregard this distinction, and to the extent of his patronage is he a foe to the community. Let the members of the medical pro-

Woman type but not conduct.

Boa
functional inferiority

profession generally, ignore this emphatic law of God, and the people shall mourn. Sir, I cannot respect a ~~mode~~ ^{thought} of practice which is based on an audacious contempt for scientific truth. The odor of innocent blood will ever inhere to the proceeds.

But the uterus, being the receptacle of the human germ, clarity suggests that the specialist may pursue his peculiar practice on the high plain of the humanitarian—that he has made it a matter of conscience to sacrifice individual female convenience and delicacy in behalf of the *race*—that, having observed a waning tendency in the Anglo-Saxon element, under a deep religious sense of *duty*, he has interposed to avert its otherwise inevitable extinguishment.

O, sir, for the credit of mankind, and the honor of our calling, how willingly would we accept that explanation. How diligently and long have we striven to conceal and deodorize this foul excrement on the body professional. Sir, we have at length palliated to the limits of respectability. Some worthy men in our ranks, prompted by the partiality of friendship have extenuated this matter until its transparency has been pierced by the popular eye—until men of ordinary intelligence have discerned that the partial specialty is as inimical to the interests of the *race*, as it is destructive of personal delicacy—that this historic persecution of the uterus has been in a measure provoked by its physiological faithfulness.

How long can the profession carry this abomination? Those who have no respect for our high vocation—who have resolved to serve self rather than science, mammon rather than mankind,—may be curious to ascertain just how much iniquity the profession can bear; but they should also sometimes recollect that *truly* as well as proverbially, there is a limit to the endurance of even the meek and patient camel.

Another particular in which the “peculiar” practice fails to commend itself, is in the efficacy of treatment. It is notorious that in no other department of medicine is there so much treatment with so little advantage—to the patient. Its remarkable inconsistencies in this regard, as exhibited in the history of some cases, confirm the growing belief that not unfrequently the date of “cure” depends to quite an extent on the doctor’s commercial discretion.

This complaint, “Speculoïd,” for which some physicians are so diligently exploring, has been by them designated the “peculiar” disease, and we must admit they have most fittingly christened it; for it is a peculiar disease. It is peculiar in the suddenness of its accession—peculiar in prevalence,—peculiar in the choice of its victims,—peculiar in its exemptions,—peculiar, O, how peculiar, in pathological insignificance,—peculiar in the exorbitant price of its treatment,—and peculiarly capricious in all its varied manifestations. In short true science will ever regard it as the most pe-

culiarly peculiar disease that ever afflicted mankind.

We cannot then accord to this rank specialty the importance it arrogates, without *denying* the efficacy of medical treatment, *ignoring* the unanimous verdict of ninety-six per cent of the profession, admitting a physiological absurdity, and endorsing God’s incompetency. t 9/

We can quite easily account for the special feature of this form of practice, though we cannot justify it. It is a fact, well known to all physicians, that on its introduction, every medicine or mode of treatment is extravagantly over-used. There is not an article in our remedial list which has not undergone this ardent ordeal, but after the first flush, each falls back into a more rational patronage. For a few months, several years ago, the application of tincture of iodine and solution nitrate silver to the internal throat was the *rage*. Almost every body was supposed to be suffering from subacute or chronic inflammation of those parts, and every physician must needs be ever armed with the facilities for the application; but the treatment, being neither agreeable nor lucrative, nor *half* as efficacious as had been hoped, it soon subsided among occasional remedial means, and mark, *nobody died of consequent neglect*. Thus this uterine treatment rose like it, promises scarcely more, and would have declined like it, but for this *trying* circumstance, a money making error dies hard.

Those medical gentlemen who seem to fancy that the circulation of the speculum was the chief end of their creation have seemed impatient to know precisely to what extent I endorse their hobby. I would prefer to define my position on this point in a paper rather than in a paragraph, but that they may have no further pretext for misrepresenting me, I will briefly explain. Ital

The Uterine *Speculum*, I believe was invented in the interests of medical science. I know that there are cases in which the instrument is valuable as a means of diagnosis. In the same time concerning the *Specialty* I as firmly believe that its *cultivation* never was conducted by clean hands, that *practically*, if not *inherently*, it is the *child of corruption*, the most *illusive*, *insidious*, and *effective demoralizer of the present day*; that it needlessly deflorates the virgin, favoring her ruin, or escaping it brings her nuptial bed under the cloud of unjust and cruel suspicion. scaps

Aye sir, and *more* than this, it has become to the *WIFE*—to her who alone of all her sex, is commissioned for that consigning embrace which lights the lamp of the soul, to *her* it has become the extinguisher of maternal affection. On a former occasion I characterized it the rampant Herod of the nineteenth century. Let me now sir, be just to the ancient dead. The jealous king came with that merciful instrument, the sword, which did not debauch woman—which, while indeed it laid low the innocents, left woman uncorrupted, Ital

polluted, untouched. For amid the desolation, thank Heaven! there yet was Rachel, in the sublimity of true motherhood weeping for her children, refusing comfort.

Sir, the uterine specialty is no common evil, it subverts the foundations of civilization, and pollutes the fountains of public virtue. Its direct antagonism to the spirit and design of our high calling is too conspicuous, too flagrant to escape the reproving notice of the profession. The vital question is inevitable. It urges itself on the mind and judgment, aye Sir, and better still, on the conscience of every physician present.

"Shall we longer suffer this scourge to devastate under the banner of our beneficent profession?"

Six months ago, at our last meeting, I read a paper, the concluding portion of which was directed to the condemnation of the excessive

use of the speculum. It excited the opposition of two or three members of the society.

What kind of opposition? open and manly argument? No, sir!

From the moment, it was intensely hated, and it was accordingly misrepresented, caricatured, jeered at and spit upon. It aroused just that virulent animosity which ever lies in wait for the utterance of a reformatory soul-saving truth.

Self respect, fidelity to principle, and a decent regard for that unqualified endorsement which the paper received from this society forbid that I should abandon my position. I prefer rather to continue to agitate the question. And sir, with the permission of the society, I propose in some form to reiterate this orthodox sentiment until the opposition shall have become decently tolerant or respectably argumentative.

For Sale at Durston's Book Store.